

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, January 3rd at 12 noon.



There are currently 51 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Happy New Year!

We expect big things out of 2007. New cars, new bridge, and improved on-time performance. There will also be some struggles and we know that our budget, with the FRC and Step-Up changes will be one of them. I'm sure these will come in your questions today, so let's get started.

Broad Run from Broad Run asks:

The parking spots at Broad Run in the extended lot that say "COMPACT CARS ONLY" are always full of SUV's and Pickup Trucks. Any plans to enforce the parking rules there? How about those people who create their own spots?

VRE Management:

I know this is an issue at Broad Run. Because parking had been tight, we asked Prince William Police Department to be lenient. I will revisit this policy.

Mark from Dale City, VA asks:

Can't you do maintenance of your railcars on weekends, instead of weekdays, so that service is not interrupted?

VRE Management:

When we can, we perform maintenance on weekends and to keep our cars in service some maintenance requires more than two days and forces the equipment out of service.

J.P. from Burke, VA asks:

Rumors circulate about VRE joining the SmartTrip system. What ideas are being considered, given that VRE uses "visual confirmation," rather than gates or turnstiles? Right now, the two seem incompatible.

VRE Management:

We do have plans to join the SmartTrip system. VRE is part of a team working on a regional fare system, which would support SmartTrip cards. Part of the coordination is ensuring that it is compatible with our system

Glen from Woodbridge, Va asks:

First, let me say while some have issues with VRE, I do not and appreciate everything you folks do - it is still leaps and bounds better than sitting in traffic into DC, and to keep up the good work with on time performance! I asked this last time, so we'll try again. I know VRE needs new engines, so what options are available now, or in the future, for acquiring them?

VRE Management:

We are looking into replacing some of our engines with newer equipment. However, at a cost of \$3.0M each, we are not currently in a position to purchase new ones. I am requesting funding for new locomotives.

Travis from Fairfax, VA asks:

Is it possible to make everyone participating in the chat to read the forum archives before submitting a question, or to encourage VRE to not waste time by answering questions that we see every month? We don't know when service will start to Spotsy or Haymarket. Trying to get funds for locomotives. VRE doesn't regulate parking at stations. Problems with your specific train (too hot, too cold, too smelly, too loud, annoying people) should be addressed to the conductor or gotrains. Looking at adding later pm trains in the future, but can't now. Fellow riders always amaze me.

VRE Management:

Okay, my job is done now. But seriously, I don't mind answering them again. Someday I hope to have a different answer.

Dawn from Fairfax Station VA asks:

I attempted to use the shuttle bus from the Church parking lot for a couple of weeks and have now given up on it. I do not understand what the policy is for using this shuttle service nor do I understand where I am to meet the bus. I submitted a question to go trains and was told I do not need to fill out a form to ride the bus. The bus driver hands me a sheet and tells me to check off my name and address. So what is right? Do I need to fill out something or not? I also will admit to being reluctant to giving out personal information without being aware of what the privacy and security policy

VRE Management:

Sorry for the confusion. The bus picks up and discharges passengers in the church parking lot. There should be no registration required. We will talk to Fairfax County, who operates the buses about fixing these issues..

Steve from Fredericksburg asks:

June, July, and August always have dismal on-time performance -- partially due to heat restrictions. It seems these worst months are the low benchmark for measuring current improved performance. What is planned to improve June-Aug. 2007 performance?

VRE Management:

The new Quantico bridge is almost complete. The elimination of this bottleneck should alleviate the rail congestion that continues to affect our on-time performance on the Fredericksburg line. While we know that heat restrictions will be in effect again this Summer, I will continue to work with CSX to lessen their impact on our service. Other improvements include better dispatching, better switch and signal maintenance, and we are also working on locomotive and cab car maintenance. All of the above, should result in an improvement in on-time performance this Summer.

Alison from Centreville, Va asks:

With the New Year starting, I would like to suggest when commuters park their cars to PLEASE TURN OFF YOUR HEADLIGHTS after you park!!! I have had countless commuters park directly across from me and leave their headlights on the entire time they were in their cars, this is very annoying and inconsiderate.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the reminder. Common courtesy is always welcome on the trains and in the parking lots.

Wendy from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

In the Leeland Parking lot, we have people who constantly park in the vendors' parking spaces, who are not vendors; however, they park there because it is closer to the train. I have written four times before and VRE responded saying that Stafford County Police should be issuing tickets. Stafford county police says that they cannot enforce the vendor parking spaces, and that is VRE's problem. At times, there are 5 cars parked there. In case there is an emergency, an emergency vehicle cannot turn easily because of the illegally parked cars in the vendors' parking spaces.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the update. I'll have our Superintendent of Operations, Safety, and Security speak to the Stafford

County about this.

Madeline Moonan from Stafford VA asks:

How does VRE plan to become more responsible concerning communications to customers? In mid December I called the VRE office because of a posting in Union Sta stating "S" train service for 12/22, 12/29. I was told by Amanda that the "S" train service was what was available. In addition, she told me there was no train service on 12/26. Obviously that was not what was scheduled but in speaking with fellow commuters I found that others had similar mis-information provided. I think what is missing is the "concept of customer." I am looking forward to a response. Madeline Moonan

VRE Management:

I had originally intended to operate the "S" schedule on both the 24th and the 29th. However, I had to change our plans and apologize for the mis-communication.

Fred from Culpeper VA asks:

Any plans to extend VRE to culpeper/ Bealeton ?

VRE Management:

While expanding our Manassas line service further south to Bealeton (and possibly Culpeper) has been reviewed, we have determined that service to the Gainesville/Haymarket areas is the better option.

Todd from Manassas, VA asks:

Will VRE customers be allowed to park at the main Red lot beside the Old Town Manassas Train station? I got a confusing parking ticket last Friday at Red Lot C. City Hall explained yesterday that although its a Red lot in the station's own parking lot, its for City Residents 'only' until 10am. I had a Red Manassas City park permit on the visor but since I had a county resident sticker, not a 'city' resident, I got a ticket. Happy New Year??

VRE Management:

Not the best way to start off the New Year! Only VRE passengers living within the City of Manassas may park in the lot adjacent to the Manassas station. The City requires that all others use the lot located near the ABC Color Lab on Prince William Street.

Randolphe from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Why would a person in a wheelchair need 2 take up 3 seats in order to accomodate them? Each morning on the 5:15 the conductor allows a wheelchair bound passenger to sit in a single chair while his empty wheel chair sits right next to him causing a dbl chair to be folded up un-utilized to accomodate an empty wheel chair. The conductor should have him sit in his own wheelchair against the single seat and allow 2 additional handicapped people to sit in the double chair. I think a little common sense on the conductors part is in order.

VRE Management:

As we start to carry more and more passengers with special needs, we are going to look more closely at the best way to accommodate them. We will take you feedback into consideration.

Scott from Spotsylvania VA asks:

How was your Christmas?

VRE Management:

I was great! Thank you. BUT, Santa did not bring me funding for new locomotives. :(

Andrew from Burke Centre asks:

Your web site says, "in January 2007, newly constructed spaces will be opened at the east end of the lot and a portion of the middle section of the lot will be blocked off". Are we losing or gaining parking spots? And how many?

VRE Management:

The next series of changes will probably begin later this month and will result in a net loss of just over 100 more spaces. Once all the details are finalized, we will let everyone know. As we lose spaces, it is critical for passengers to use the shuttles from St. Mary's Church and the library. Buses are scheduled to have riders arrive at the station about 10 minutes before trains depart.

helen from montross va. asks:

Question? I have been riding VRE for the last six years and have always purchase a montly ticket but here in lies the problem, Metro Benefits are not handed out until tomorrow so the only thing that I can do is pay for today twice , by purchasing a ticket for today and a one way ticket tomorrow and once I receive my metro checks I'll purchase a monthly ticket paying for today and half of day tomorrow also . Is there anything that can be done to help me? Could I've used my December ticket until tomorrow ? Thanks

VRE Management:

Your best option is to purchase your ticket at the station TVM using a credit card. Then, simply mail your Metrocheks and a Metrochek reimbursement form to us. We will credit back your account for the amount of Metrocheks you send us. Check out the Metrochek information on our Website for more information.

Ardy from Burke Centre asks:

Good afternoon: Thank you for deciding to charge the VRE's Amtrak Step-Up customers' their true fare, instead of surcharging the rest of us. Happy New Year!

VRE Management:

This was a tough decision. For those who use the Amtrak trains, I know that this is a significant increase. However, the fare that Amtrak riders pay must cover not only what we pay Amtrak, but must also fund our overall operational costs which those who ride VRE trains currently fund.

Vic from Manassas asks:

Since yesterday was a non-work day for the federal government, why was the grace period for obtaining monthly tickets not extended until today?

VRE Management:

While I sympathize, we operated a full service yesterday and the grace period for the Monthly pass was honored then. This one more reason that we suggest passengers purchase their tickets in advance.

Dan from Gainesville asks:

Do you have exact dates and train #'s yet for the introduction of the new cab cars?

VRE Management:

We are still finalizing the details. Once we have that information, we will let everyone know.

RJ from F'burg asks:

First, congrats on your improved OTP... Its much better than last year. I don't understand your reasoning to scrap the FRCs. There will now be no incentive for your crews to be on time unless you dock their pay. It seems to me that if you are on time, you don't need to worry about handing out the FRCs, hence it cuts the cost of handing them out. Hmm... an interesting concept on time all the time don't you think? Why can't you charge back to CSX/NS for delays resulting in FRCs being issued when the delay is their fault ("signal problems"/"switch problems"/"outlaw trains")?

VRE Management:

I'm glad you have noticed the improvement in on-time performance. While I understand your concern about the FRC Program, it was not put into place as a form of crew incentive -- as many of the delays our trains encounter are outside of their control. The FRC Program costs us about \$100K a year. During the review of our 2008 budget, the committee recommended the elimination of this program in an effort to balance our budget. This was approved by our Operations Board. In the end you are right, better on-time performance will minimize the effect of

the elimination of this program.

Pat from Burke asks:

I jumped ship to Metro bus and rail about 6 months ago. What are you doing to try to get me back? PS - I was a loyal VRE rider for nearly 6 years before delays and rate increases got to me.

VRE Management:

While I am sorry that we lost you as a rider, I am glad that you still keep up with our news. Our on-time performance over the last three months on both lines has been the best it's been in several years. With that in mind, I hope that on some snowy day you will give us another chance.

Birtha from Culpeper asks:

Happy holidays VRE staff. Although the new gallery cars are nice, a lot of us shop at Costco and have a little extra padding to carry aboard (if you know what I mean). The seats are not comfy for us Costco shoppers. Are there any plans to keep the Mafersa cars? They're more comfy. Thanks!!

VRE Management:

We are concerned about your comfort. Unfortunately for you, the Mafersa cars have been sold and will be off the property in March. We spent a lot of time designing the seats on the new cars and we think that you will like them too.

frank from f'burg asks:

Just curious ... what was ridership like yesterday? The Leeland Rd lot was pretty sparse. Maybe an "S" schedule the next time.

VRE Management:

Ridership was extremely light. However, the timing was too difficult to put an "S" schedule into effect. Informing riders of a cut in service the day before a three-day weekend when many people were off was simply not adequate. We preferred to operate all of our trains so that no one would have to wait on a platform for an extra half-hour.

Emil from Burke, Virginia asks:

Who supervises the Conductors? I have observed on numerous occasions that, although some do an outstanding job, others are just plain lazy -- they don't make next-station announcements, rarely, if ever, check tickets, and never deploy the yellow "step" at platforms (eg., Crystal City) where the drop from the first car to the station is higher than usual.

VRE Management:

Our crews are contracted from Amtrak. As a result, Amtrak supervises our conductors and engineers. I will continue to work with Amtrak to create a more standardized level of service on our trains.

leroy from fredericksburg,va asks:

Now that you have effectively priced out commuters from using Amtrak trains, how does the VRE plan to absorb the extra commuters on trains that already run at capacity?

VRE Management:

Currently those VRE trains that operate close to our most heavily used Amtrak trains are not full. We can add more cars to those VRE trains if we need to.

Paul from Burke, VA asks:

Train 332's consist was changed a couple weeks ago. As a result even with the reduced numbers of holiday passengers the train has been crowded and uncomfortable. This morning the train was very crowded and we still don't have normal passenger levels back. What is the deal? There used to be plenty of seats available on this

train - whay was it changed?

VRE Management:

Currently, three Sounder coaches are out of service for wheel replacement. Once the maintenance is completed, they will be returned to service.

VRE Management:

Well my time is up. It is tough to get back in the groove. We may not have been as fast as we usually are -- a little rusty after the holidays. We will certainly be back in the swing of things by our next forum on February 7.

I look forward to chatting with you again. Happy New Year!

Dale

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